

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Parents Get a Hotline To Check School Walking Distances

(July 15, 2009) Hartford Public Schools today set up a special hotline to let parents know whether their children will be among those who will have to walk to school this year due to transportation budget cuts.

The hotline number, **860-695-8547** will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays through the beginning of the school year and will be staffed by district personnel and temporary workers, so as to cut down on waiting time.

Parents need only provide their address and the name of the school that their child will be attending to find out whether the district will provide bus service for that student. Families can also determine the distance to their school on the district's website at <http://www.hartfordschools.org> by following the link to "Smart Choice."

As was previously announced, the school system will be reinstating the walking distances that were in effect during the 2007-2008 school year – and thereby will use fewer school buses – in order to close a \$4.3 million deficit in its transportation budget. Reducing the transportation budget was deemed a far better option than taking additional funds from classroom instruction.

The new walking distances are as follows:

Within a **half-mile** of school for grades K, 1 and 2,

Within **One mile** of school for grades 3, 4 and 5,

Within **One mile and a half** of school for grades 6, 7 and 8,

Within **Two Miles** of school for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The district will also be implementing a three-tier bus schedule with a corresponding change in bell times to be consistent with the tiers. Tier 1 is 7:45 a.m.; Tier 2 is 8:15 a.m. and Tier 3 is 8:45 a.m. More cluster stops will be introduced as well to reduce travel time.

The objective of the changes is to use fewer buses more efficiently.

Hartford Public School is launching several initiatives to assist parents and students in adjusting to the new walking distances.

Through the Federal Highway Administration's "Safe Routes To School" program, district officials are forming a "Walking School Bus", in which parent volunteers who walk to school pick up other students along the way and drop them off at home at the end of the school day. High school students who have to walk more than a mile and a half to school will be offered free CT Transit bus passes. And if there are vacant seats on a school bus, they will be filled on a space-available basis to those parents who request it, starting with the youngest children.

The school system will be reminding parents throughout the summer by way of fliers, posters, direct mailings and automated phone messages to call the hotline and check their travel distances before the beginning of school on Aug. 31.

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